

Dr. D. Cover Sheet**Michael Higley-Vance****August 29, 2013**

EDU7002-8	Dr. Donna Rice
Educational Research Methodology	Assignment #2: Locating Topics of Interest

From your personal experiences and educational interests:

1. Develop a list of 8-10 topics of interest within your field of study. Using the NCU library, locate peer-reviewed articles that are centered on the topics you have identified.
2. Using the topics and the literature reviewed, identify and summarize 3-5 topics of interests you believe have the potential for doctoral level research (refer to your reading in Leedy and Ormrod (2010) for the definition of doctoral level research).
3. Summarize each topic succinctly in one-two paragraphs.
4. Each topic should be supported by personal observations and include at least one related citation from the literature.

Length: 5-7 pages (app. 350 words per page). Include at least one reference.

Your essay should demonstrate thoughtful consideration of the ideas and concepts that are presented in the course and provide new thoughts and insights relating directly to this topic. Your response should reflect scholarly writing and current APA standards.

Faculty Use Only

Michael, I enjoyed reading about your topics and am looking forward to seeing which one you decide to research. I love your writing style! Note to eliminate direct quotations whenever possible. Please see comments throughout and on the Grading Key. Be sure to use the Best Practices Handbook and use the sample papers I post. See the directions for Activities 3 and 4 below. Please call me with questions! 757 871 1336

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For Activity 3 "Characteristics of Research Problems" ensure you follow the directions for the assignment and the eight characteristics you are required to point out in the comment feature for Activity 4 are mentioned in a section of your Activity 3 paper.

1. The statement of the problem is well within 250-300 words
2. Clearly stated general problem
3. The general problem is described in more specific terms and more citations are offered to thoroughly ground all assertions in the literature

4. After presenting the general issue here is the specific focused problem statement using the phrase, "The specific problem is to investigate..."
5. The specific problem the research project will address is identified and validated by more citations.
6. A clear explanation of why this is a research worthy problem includes generous use of citations.
7. Eight to 15 citations were used to validate this brief problem statement.
8. Absolutely avoid one of the most common errors in problem statements (and literature reviews): reporting what previous researchers have done instead of using critically evaluated findings from previous research to demonstrate the existence of a gap in knowledge appropriate to a dissertation. Your problem statement must use sources to show what we know and do not know, not what researchers have done and not done.

For Activity 4 "Draft the Research Problem" ensure you include the eight characteristics as they relate to your problem statement using the comments feature.

Grading Key

10 Excellent	9 Above Average	8 Adequate	7 Needs Improvement	6 Not Acceptable
25 Excellent	20 Above Average	15 Adequate	10 Needs Improvement	5 Not Acceptable

Content 70%

- 10 Demonstrated a well-developed focus (Introduction)
 - 10 Thorough points of development (Listed major points to be covered)
 - 10 A logical pattern or organization of discussion ideas and concepts required in activity (used at least two levels of headings)
 - 10 Achieved stated learning outcome(s)
 - 10 Integrated key concepts and terms from course materials
 - 10 Evaluated and applied concepts learned
 - 10 Demonstrated learning through use of examples and/or illustrations
 - 10 Supported insights and assertions through research and use of additional outside academic resources
- | [9/10](#) Met length requirement ([1530 out of 1750](#))
- 10 Ended with a conclusion that summarized paper without adding new information and without repeating introduction

| [99/100](#) Total

Writing 30%

- | [23](#)/25 Appropriate and precise language
- | [23](#)/25 Proper use of APA
 - 25 Clear divisions between the writer’s voice and the sources used to support claims
 - 25 Consistent use of standard American English in grammar and punctuation
- | [96](#)/100 Total

Topics of Interest
Michael Higley-Vance
Northcentral University

Topics of Interest

During economically challenging times in a rapidly growing world of technology educational institutions around the world are beginning to incorporate and establish online learning environments where the various learning and financial needs of e-learners are being addressed. “The economic impact has been greatest on demand for online courses, with 66 percent of institutions reporting increased demand for new courses and programs and 73 percent seeing increased demand for existing online courses and programs” (Allen & Seaman, 2010, p. 1) and “more than one in four higher education students now take at least one course online” (p. 1). The purpose of this paper is to discuss topics of interest related to the growing phenomenon of online learning environments, which have the potential for doctoral level research. The paper will be supported with personal experiences, observations, and citations derived from the reviewed literature. The topics of interest I will discuss are (a) specific course design and development, b) learner characteristics that increase successful online learning experiences, and c) teaching strategies that enhance online learning environments. In this paper I will reflect on each potential topic of interest using a few of the research guidelines Leedy and Ormord (2010) identify as strategies for finding a legitimate research problem. These strategies include personal observations and interest, reviewing the literature, and choosing a topic, which has the potential to address a problem that has immediate relevance to the educational community (pp. 46-48).

Course Design and Development

As an educator in the public school system, for more than ten years, I have created hundreds of lessons where planning instruction and student activities have played an important role in teaching and student learning. I have found that in a traditional classroom learning naturally happens in two ways, synchronously and asynchronously however, in online environments what naturally occurs in the traditional classroom becomes areas of teaching

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Comment [1]: Enclose letters when enumerating within paragraphs – see APA sample paper I provided

practice that must be emphasized and purposefully embedded in the online environment (Roseth, Akcaoglu, & Zellner, 2013). In any learning environment the teacher should always create lesson activities that are engaging, rigorous, relevant, and challenging; this is often referred to as the constructivist-learning model. It is considered the most effective model used in developing and designing online learning environments (O'Neil, 2009, p. 84).

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Comment [2]: Try to reword sentence to eliminate "that are"

Course design and development often refers to a systematic and reflective process that translates the qualities of learning and instruction into activities and assessments (O'Neil, 2009, p. 83). With the aforementioned qualities of lesson development in mind it is easy to see the relationships between traditional classroom lesson planning and online course development. The challenge becomes embedding these characteristics successfully into online learning environments and course work (Roseth, Akcaoglu, & Zellner, 2013). Although there is plenty of evidence, which supports the use of instructional-design theory and a constructivist approach to course design and development, little research has been found which provides evidence that the use of an overall course design framework can be applied successfully to specific disciplines (Arbaugh et al., 2009).

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Comment [3]: This is good – just remember in your justification you need more than lack of research

Learner Characteristics

Between 1998-1999 online course enrollment was reported to be at 19,000 and 47% of those learners did not successfully complete the online course (Tirrell & Quick, 2012, pp. 581). Despite these difficulties, the national trend for enrollment in online courses has steadily grown with numbers reported in the fall of 2006 to be as high as 3.5 million (para. 3, p. 581). The student attrition rate is not just a function of online course development but, also, an intrinsic educational motivation and skills learners possess, which will ultimately contribute to their

online learning success. In my educational experience the most difficult challenge I face is developing lessons in a learning environment, which are relevant and interesting to all learners. As a teacher I'm responsible for creating lesson activities that are not only rigorous and challenging but features multiple learning options, is engaging, and emphasizes collaboration (p. 581-582). In any learning environment the ultimate success of a student is often intrinsic and in education this [motivation] "has been identified as a critical factor affecting learning" (Chen & Jang, 2010, p. 741).

According to Samruayruen, Enriquez, Natakuatoong, and Samruayruen (2013), there are five characteristics learners must acquire in order to be successful in online learning environments. They refer to these characteristics as factors, which include an intrinsic goal, self-efficacy, an awareness of one's own test anxiety, a cognitive strategy, and good time management skills (p. 56). Although the research reviewed indicates that these learning characteristics have several influencing factors such as, student demographics and having regular access to internet connectivity, the study conducted by Samruayruen et al. consistently supports three of the five learner characteristics as the most reliable (p. 66). An intrinsic goal and students' self-efficacy remain the least researched and written about learner characteristics, suggesting that more research should be conducted in this area of online student learning. Chen and Jang (2010) suggest that one possible reason might be a strong "focus on the student cognition while ignoring affective, socio-emotional processes" (p. 741).

Online Teaching Strategies

Educational institutions have been developing online learning environments with traditional classroom principles and characteristics in mind for years however, a successful online learning environment now features "multiple learning options for students, engages

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Comment [4]: The sentence will be clearer with "that" than ,which because it is not parenthetical

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Comment [5]: Do not use contractions in academic writing

students in their own learning, emphasizes collaboration, shifts teacher to a facilitator role, and documents improved and expanded student learning” (Tirrell & Quick, 2012, pp. 581-582), which is a major shift away from traditional classroom practices. The teaching strategies used in online classroom environments are highly dependent on the learner and content being taught. There is no such thing as a one size fits all approach to learning online but what is important is having a rationale for using the teaching strategies selected (O'Neil, 2009, p. 88). Below I will reflect on important features found in online learning environments, which characterize two successful teaching strategies I've experienced as a student taking online courses.

Multiple learning paths. In my classroom there is always more than one way to teach a specific content or skill and therefore, more than one way the learning objective can be accomplished. The same is true for online learning environments and course work. According to Pachler and Daly (2011) there are several types of online learning environment paths that provide for multiple learning styles needed to be successful. Examples of these are informal, self-paced, and instructor led online environments (p. 133). Each learning path provides the learner with a tailored learning experience best suited for his or her own online learning style. Although there is research that identifies the various online learning environments there is a lack of research and evidence, which can conclusively pair these learning environments with specific online learning styles. I would argue that there are learning styles directly connected to learning online that deserve thorough investigation and which have yet to be identified (O'Neil, 2009; Chen & Jang, 2010; Pachler & Daly, 2011; Tirrell & Quick, 2012), which might be similar but different to traditional learning styles already well researched.

Student engagement. Effective student engagement can be characterized by two online qualities: student-to-student collaboration or student-to-teacher collaboration and teacher as

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Comment [6]: Try not to overuse

facilitator of instruction. To do this successfully the teaching strategies utilized must include collaboration and socialization activities. In order to get students to participate this means creating a learning environment with activities and lesson objectives that is safe, supportive, and motivating (O'Neil, 2009, p. 84). Collaboration gives learners the chance to share and discover information together. In this teaching strategy the teacher moves away from direct instruction to one of facilitator to student self-discovery and awareness of his or her cognitive learning.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to identify topics of interest related to the growing phenomenon of online learning environments. The strategies I used to identify these topics were personal observations, literature review, and topics that have the potential for more research and collaboration. In addition to the obvious benefit of helping to forge increased collegiality amongst scholars in online learning environments, such collaborations would yield other benefits to the field. First, ongoing inquiry specific to course design and development would help generate more research to identify different and possibly better ways of designing scholarly online learning environments. Second, a continued focus on learning characteristics that increase successful online learning experiences have the potential for ongoing research due to the constant change in technology development and social media. The way people interact with technology and social media will help researchers define how potential learners will engage in various online learning environments. Third, ongoing research in the first two areas provides for an easy transition into exploring various teaching strategies, which connect to course design and characteristics of online learning. More research and collaborations, of course, would yield a more grounded perspective for examining these topics of interest. Not only would I be able to say which learning styles are best paired with which online teaching style, I would also be able to

identify the learning environment best suited to both these topic areas and better explain why.

Additionally, these suggested research areas benefit online learning and have the potential to address a lack of empirical research that has immediate relevance to the educational community.

References

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